



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Cherry Springs State Park Taking Steps to Ensure Great Visitor Experience During Dark Sky Programs

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources today announced it will be initiating several changes at the park in an effort to preserve the “dark sky” experience while improving visitors’ satisfaction and safety at Cherry Springs State Park in Potter County.

“Interest in Cherry Springs State Park and its *Night Sky Tour* astronomy programs is growing exponentially. The park’s Dark Sky designation is drawing visitors from hundreds of miles away with international representation to the Pennsylvania Wilds,” said Bureau of State Parks Director David Kemmerer. “It is inspiring to see so many people combining their love of the outdoors with an innate curiosity about the stars.”

Cherry Springs State Park is designated as an International Dark Sky Park by the Dark Sky Association -- it is the only Dark Sky Park in Pennsylvania. This designation indicates the park’s location provides exceptional night-time beauty, dark skies education programming, and preservation of the night-time environment.

Since its designation in 2008, attendance for the park’s evening programs has grown to unprecedented numbers.

“Recent traditional and “viral” social media coverage has catapulted some program attendance to more than 600 participants. The heightened popularity of this internationally recognized natural treasure has placed a heavy burden on the park facilities and staff, not to mention the integrity of the experience,” Kemmerer said. “We’re thrilled that so many people want to come, but we also want to make sure they have a quality visit when they get here.”

Changes ranging from revised program scheduling and registration processes to improvements to the viewing area landscape are being discussed by the Bureau of State Park team with an eye toward balancing public access, comfort, and experience and protecting the park’s Dark Sky characteristics.

In the interim, starting July 1, visitors who want to attend Night Sky Tour programs at Cherry Springs State Park will be asked to preregister online on the DCNR Events Calendar at <http://events.dcnr.pa.gov>.

To register for Night Sky programs follow these steps:

- ‘Click on “Places to Go” and scroll to Cherry Springs State Park and click on the park name (orange text).
- Review the list of events offered at Cherry Springs State Park and select the event of your choice.

- On the event page select the blue “Register” button at the top right, and complete the required information.

Night Sky Tour programming at the park also is being expanded to include Sunday evenings and select weeknights during the months of July and August.

The park already has made several on-site changes that are complementary to the Dark Sky designation. In an effort to preserve night vision and prevent light pollution, red-lit walkways now mark the path from the public program parking area to the seating area. Red cellophane also is available to cover flashlights. Signage that explains night sky viewing etiquette is currently in design and will be placed at access points this summer.

Visitors can help protect the stargazing experience for all by:

- Arriving while it is still light so they can orient themselves to the park;
- If arriving after sunset, use low-beam headlights when arriving or departing the parking area and turn headlights off immediately after your vehicle is parked;
- Leave pets at home if attending a Night Sky Program; dim lighting, large crowds and sensitive equipment do not create a pet friendly environment;
- Visiting the park during the week of a new moon or the week prior for maximum viewing;
- Considering visiting on a weeknight -- crowds are usually smaller; and

Visitors may want to check the Clear Sky Chart for Cherry Spring’s web site for current cloud cover and viewing conditions at <http://cleardarksky.com/c/ChrSprPkPAkey.html>. The Cherry Springs Dark Sky Fun -- the parks friends group -- provides additional information about viewing etiquette at <http://www.csspdarkskyfund.org/home/index>.

Cherry Springs State Park in the Pennsylvania Wilds is nearly as remote and wild today as it was two centuries ago. Its dark skies make it a haven for astronomers. Named for the large stands of black cherry trees in the park, the 82-acre park is surrounded by the 262,000-acre Susquehannock State Forest. The Susquehannock Trail passes nearby and offers 85 miles of backpacking and hiking.

For information on Cherry Springs State Park, or any of Pennsylvania’s 120 state parks, visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us, contact the park complex at (814) 435-5010 or by e-mail at lymansp@pa.gov

Additional Information about Dark Sky preservation is available at www.darksky.org.

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